

Second Sunday after Pentecost – Epistle

**STANDING WITH EACH OTHER AS SERVANTS OF GOD
2 Corinthians 6:1-13**

**Second Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 7)
Analysis by Carolyn Schneider**

1 As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. 2 For he says, “At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you.” See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation! 3 We are putting no obstacle in anyone’s way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, 4 but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, 5 beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; 6 by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, 7 truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; 8 in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; 9 as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see – we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; 10 as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything. 11 We have spoken frankly to you Corinthians; our heart is wide open to you. 12 There is no restriction in our affections, but only in yours. 13 In return – I speak as to children – open wide your hearts also.

DIAGNOSIS: Restricting the activity of God

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – *Noticing the Weakness of God's Servants*

Paul presented himself to the Corinthians as a person whose life was one of fasting, purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, a holy spirit, non-hypocritical love, and a true message, all by the power of God. But he made no effort to hide the fact that his life was also one of endurance, trouble, necessity, difficulty, beatings, imprisonment, riots, hard work, and sleeplessness. Other apostles who came to Corinth had more respectable resumes, stronger letters of reference, more persuasive speech, and a more powerful presence. These latter apostles impressed the Corinthians, and friction began to develop between Paul and the Corinthians through painful letters and even more painful visits.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – *Ignoring the Work of the Holy Spirit*

Paul presses the Corinthians to examine why his weakness is such a problem for them. He has not hurt them, so why do they despise him? In fact, his work among them has resulted in a community of such active faith that he uses their story to establish his credentials when he goes to other communities. Paul worries that in fixating on the messenger's power or lack of power, the Corinthians will forfeit the message that the Holy Spirit has made effective among them. But, since the Holy Spirit's work results in compassion for the weak, not disdain, the Corinthians appear to have turned away from the Holy Spirit.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – *Having a God Who Cannot Be Where Imperfection Is*

So it seems that the Corinthians are starting to think that they

have not yet received the real Holy Spirit from the real Almighty God. Now they are looking for something better than what they received through Paul. (I teach a course called Introduction to Theology to college students. About a month ago, I quoted to one of my classes Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 5:21, "For our sake [God] made [Christ] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." They were shocked because, like the Corinthians, they believed that God does not truly experience shame, slander, deceit, ignominy, death, discipline, injury and poverty in a way that makes these things truly God's own. Rather, they believed that God is involved only in glory, praise, truth, fame, life, joy and wealth. But, if this is so, then when a community is thrown into crisis, or when it comes one's turn to be weak, to be at one's limits, or to die, then one is alone without any God.) The perfect God cannot reside where imperfection is.

PROGNOSIS: Widening

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – Welcoming God in Hell

Paul wants to save the Corinthians from this hell, so he insists that he did not come to them to highlight himself, but to highlight Jesus as the Messiah. This Jesus does not abandon the weak but stays with them as a partner to bring them through thick and thin. Full of the Holy Spirit, Jesus has compassion not only for the brilliant but even for the disreputable and criminal. When Paul is in prison, his God is just as powerfully present and at work for him as God is when Paul is free and in good standing. God seizes every moment to be our savior, and Paul urges the Corinthians to welcome this grace.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – Possessing Everything by the Work of the Holy Spirit

In Christ, God's righteousness is flowing to us whether we are

in need of help or whether we are in a position to give help. The Corinthians are in a position to console others, as they have been consoled (2 Corinthians 1:3-7). Paul tells them over and over again that they are his pride and joy, his reason for boasting. He wants them to see all the faith and knowledge and generosity that they have been given. They are not lacking, but in fact, they possess everything (2 Corinthians 6:10), so that they, like their savior, may share everything with those who have nothing. Paul urges them to stand with each other as servants of God in all things.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – *Becoming Partners with God's Servants*

Opening the Corinthians up to the world beyond themselves, Paul makes the specific suggestion that they take up a collection to help the impoverished Christian community in Jerusalem. If they want God to work in spectacular ways, then they should send a spectacular offering to their brothers and sisters. Paul expresses his hope that in the process the Corinthians will be reconciled to him, too. There is no reason to find fault with his ministry when the Holy Spirit is so manifestly at work in their lives.